



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Cast your Vote

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Welcome

It's Election Day. And this month's issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings is being sent early this month - the theme worked perfectly for today.

I am a proponent of interaction in meetings -- getting participants involved. This issue talks about ways to "vote" during meetings. From the simple to complex, this democratic ideal is a perfect way to introduce audience involvement.

Politics aside, the ideals of freedom, liberty, and free speech are integral to meetings. I had fun thinking of the links between politics, meetings and voting. Go with the theme! And if you are a US Citizen cast your vote today and be sure to add the innovative twist of voting to a meeting in your future.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS As I was cleaning up my database, some subscribers may have just received the October issue. My "e-mailing campaign" promise to you today: You won't hear from me again until December.

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The Variety of Voting Machines

Just as the voting machines and ballots have a different look, voting in a meeting can be accomplished in various ways. This issue will offer some of my favorite ways including:

1. Electronic Surveys
2. Index Card Polling
3. Dots
4. Multi-voting

"People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote - a very different thing."

- Walter H. Judd, a legislator, physician, missionary and orator, who was Awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan in 1981

From low cost to high tech, these forms of voting will add to your next meeting. Offer people a chance to have a voice during your next meeting.

Taxation without Representation

The underlying issue behind the Boston Tea Party uprising was the American colonists' opposition to being taxed without having a voice in their government. I think there is an analogy for meetings.

How often do we expect full participation without representation? We, the organizers, set the agenda, determine the sessions, set priorities and finalize timeframes (often) without asking the participants what they think, need or want.

You can change the Taxation without Representation status through the use of electronic surveys. The wide variety of web-based survey tools make it simple to ask people their opinion or ask them to vote on a variety of issues. This information can assist you in scheduling, planning and delivering an innovative meeting.

Email me if you are interested in my experience with a variety of on-line survey tools. Click here [Electronic Surveys](#) or send an email to stinnish@ameritech.net.

Red, White and Blue

Actually, I favor Red, Green and Yellow index cards as an inexpensive but highly effective method of polling audiences.

When looking for a range of responses (not simply a yes or no answer), I often resort to colored index cards. I will place three index cards (one of each color) at the participant's place setting. Periodically, during the presentation, I can ask questions and see by a show of index cards who

- Agrees (Green index card)
- Neither Agrees nor Disagrees (Yellow index card)

- Disagrees (Red index card)

Asking these questions engages the audiences and causes them to connect, contemplate and the participate as they show their colors.

As a presenter, it is relatively easy to gauge the overall sense of a room based upon the sea of color that appears.

Beyond the Two-Party System

Another form of voting that I favor works well when presenting people with a large number of choices. Polling or even a show of hands works well when you asking people to vote for "A" or "B" or even "C" like in the Presidential elections.

When there are multiple choices or when you want people to prioritize, I like to use "dots". Dots are those 5/8-inch circle stickers that you can buy in a myriad of colors. (I also used them for the 2 garage sales I have done in my life. I honestly have never used them for anything else.) They are packaged 42 to a sheet.

The dots represent people's votes. When voting with dots, you ask people to place one dot on a flip chart, pre-made sign or other written materials posted around the room.

People will get up, view their potential choices posted around the room and vote by placing their dot on the posted material.

I often ask people to vote for the "top three things" by giving them three dots.

"Dot" voting gives people a mini-stretch break, promotes minor interaction as the group votes, and still provides anonymity for the audience. And the presenter as well as the entire audience can easily and visually see how the group as a whole felt. The colorful dots are easy to spot and assess which option the group voted for.

Run-off Elections

Multi-Voting is a system of holding run-off elections to gain consensus from the meeting participants.

Multi-voting is a way to select the most important items (typically from a larger list - perhaps a list generated from brainstorming) with limited discussion and difficulty. It is accomplished by a series of voting rounds, usually 2 or 3 rounds, which cut the list of items with each vote. I find multi-voting particularly useful after a brainstorming session in which many items have been identified.

Multi-voting is a group effort where each and every member of the group is allowed to voice their opinion on the importance of items contained on the list through a vote. Those items receiving the highest rankings from the group warrant further attention/consideration first.

The Process of Multi-Voting:

1. Generate a list of items from your participants and number the list on a flip chart.
2. If 2 or more items seem very similar, combine them after obtaining group agreement. As necessary, renumber the items.
3. Give each member a number of votes equal to at least 1/3 of the total number of items on the list. Multi-voting works even when everyone can vote for the maximum number of items on the list. Voting can occur by a show of hands with the leader voting last.
4. Conduct 1st voting round and eliminate items with the fewest votes. If it is a small group, cross off items with only or 2 votes; if it is a medium size group, cross off any items with 3 or fewer votes; if it is a large group, cross off items with 4 or fewer votes. Another rule of thumb is to identify items which received less than half of the number of votes equal to the group size.
5. Determine if anyone disagrees with the eliminating of these items. If someone feels strongly about a item, then it should remain for voting during the next round. Gain consensus and agreement with the entire group before eliminating items.
6. Eliminate the items over which there is no conflict by crossing them off the original list.
7. Continue this process for additional more voting rounds until the list is small enough to select a specific item for further work.

Multi-voting works! It is a very useful strategy for setting goals and priorities when groups have trouble making decisions. An example of an application of multi-voting you might employ is for small group sessions where the group (or table) is deciding on specific outcomes and activities when gaining agreement on what is most important.

One advantage of the multi-voting method is it provides a relatively quick and democratic means of generating lists of prioritized ideas or goals. Participants feel "heard" and people are satisfied with the consensus reached.

The Secret Ballot

Akin to a secret ballot for its anonymity are Audience Response Systems. An Audience Response System or ARS is a computerized system by which the audience participants enter their responses to questions on hand-held computer terminals. These terminals transmit individual responses back to a computer that instantly tabulates the data, and then (typically) displays a summary of the results for the audience to review.

ARS has several benefits including:

- Results immediately stored and calculated. This avoids data entry errors that can occur when converting paper information into electronic files.
- Allows participants to respond anonymously which encourages more thoughtful and honest responses
- Helps avoid Groupthink as participants realize that they will not be singled out for their answers. Also participants become less likely to follow the lead of a dominant personality.
- More willing to participate, which further improves response rates and sample accuracy. This can be especially important when discussing sensitive topics.

- Meeting leader/presenter can clarify questions or options to all group members at once, thus avoiding biases common in one-on-one interviews or individual self-paced techniques.
- Display of results generates interesting conversations

Give 'Em the Vote

Their are many reasons to give your participants the vote. Consider the 7 ways your meeting will be enhanced:

1. Gather demographic information and identify responses from individuals or groups
2. Encourage participation
3. Generate valuable feedback and opinions
4. Improve comprehension
5. Increase retention
6. Add excitement and enthusiasm (typically fun, also)
7. Assess a meeting's impact by having participants' answer the same questions at the start of the event and the end. This pre- and post-assessment allows comparison of the results, gauge swings of opinion, and also assess learning. The core to truly measuring a meetings ROI (Return on Investment).

There are many places to introduce voting into meetings. Use voting for:

- Group Decision Support System (consultant speak for helping people make decisions)
- Strategic Planning
- Advertising Testing
- Focus Group Research
- Market Research
- Game Shows or Team Competitions
- Delegate and shareholder voting
- Classroom Training and Interactive Distance Learning
- Trade Shows
- Employee and Customer Surveys
- Overall Audience Participation
- Opinion Analysis and Polling
- Multisite meetings/videoconferences
- Assessment and Auditing
- Self Assessment
- Evaluating Presenters
- Evaluating the Meeting

Freebies: Politics & Meetings

FREEBIES: Politics & Meetings

I see more lessons from politics for meetings. Consider these tongue-in-cheek remarks

and the potential lessons for us:

The politicians were talking themselves red, white and blue in the face.

- Clare Boothe Luce

During a campaign the air is full of speeches - and vice versa.

- Author Unknown

Lesson: Make sure your meeting is not full of talking heads, without giving the opportunity to your participants to have a voice in the meeting

More FREEBIES For more thoughts on politics (without getting political) and meetings, click here [Politics Aside](#) or send an email to stinnish@ameritech.net.

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be attending ROI Certification™ — The Complete Impact Measurement Workshop, a 5 Day Workshop offered by the Jack Phillips' Center for Research to provide hands-on measurement experience. Selected by Meeting Professionals International, I will learn how to enhance program results, measure the contribution of programs, and calculate return on investment (ROI). In turn, I will be one of the facilitators leading MPI's ROI II Platinum series programs in 2005.

I will be speaking at the following conferences:

[Minneapolis Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, February 2005](#)

[South Florida Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, February 22, 2005](#)

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me!

I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

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June 2000: **Green Meetings** and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: **Values** and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: **Minimum/Minimal Meetings** and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: **Evaluations** and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: **Politics**

December 2000: **Toys** and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) and (Freebie) Sales Tips
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